



## U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools

U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) is a federal outreach initiative structured as a recognition award that helps to promote effective school sustainability and collaboration. By highlighting schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions' cost-saving, health promoting, and performance-enhancing sustainability practices, it seeks to encourage other institutions to adopt these practices as well.

In 2011, several score non-profits joined forces to request that the U.S. Department of Education (ED) honor schools for their sustainable facilities, health practices, and effective environmental education. The award that evolved from this petition, U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS),<sup>1</sup> was the first comprehensive federal sustainable schools recognition award; made a significant impact on the green schools movement; and allowed ED an unprecedented platform to address school facilities, health, and environment.

ED developed<sup>2</sup> a consensus definition of a green school consisting of the three Pillars of the award: 1) reducing environmental impacts, such as waste, water, energy, greenhouse gases, and transportation in the areas of facilities, grounds, and operations; 2) improving health and wellness through coordinated school health, with consideration to air quality, contaminant control, acoustics, daylighting, thermal comfort, school food, and outdoors physical activity; and 3) offering effective environmental and sustainability education that emphasizes hands-on, real-world learning, civic engagement, STEM connections, and green career preparation.

Annually, state education officials participate by nominating their top schools<sup>3</sup>, districts, and postsecondary institutions.<sup>4</sup> States have flexibility in their selection and nomination, provided that they document progress for each nominee in all of the three Pillars.<sup>5</sup>

While it began with a school award alone, ED added a district, postsecondary institution, and state education agency official's award over time. It grew its outreach, engagement, and liaising functions with a resource [website](#), an annual tour, a newsletter, and social media to communicate free sustainability programs, grants, and webinars available to all schools.

The award has facilitated new collaborations to the benefit of schools. For example, it enables ED to share free programs for schools offered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Interior, and Energy; and collaborators across the for- and non-profit private sectors. Similarly, many state education agencies are collaborating in exceptional ways with state health,

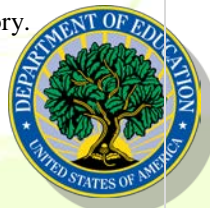
<sup>1</sup> This initiative is called U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools and its outreach and engagement arm is referred to as Green Strides. "Green Ribbon Schools" alone is a non-federal program run by another entity.

<sup>2</sup> ED worked with dozens of nonprofits and federal agencies to develop this definition.

<sup>3</sup> Magnet schools, charter schools, non-public schools, and early learning institutions are all eligible in this category.

<sup>4</sup> States where education agencies do not participate cannot have honorees selected for the federal award.

<sup>5</sup> The nominations made by states are posted on the ED website.



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environment, and energy agencies to select their nominees to ED.<sup>6</sup> The private sector, both for- and non-profit, has also gotten involved at federal, state, local, and school levels, working with schools and governments.

Another important consequence of the award has been the refinement of various national and state-specific green schools programs that it has spurred. Many states have realigned pre-existing state green schools programs, built new ones, and now recognize runners-up beyond those they nominate to ED, in order to create pathways to the national award, broaden recognition within individual states, and incentivize more change.

Schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions do not apply for the award to ED, but to their [state education authorities](#). For this reason, candidates must contact their state departments of education or state higher education authorities for information on selection. State participation in the award is voluntary and not all state education authorities choose to nominate schools, districts, or postsecondary institutions, but hearing from interested institutions may be helpful to a state in determining whether it wishes to nominate.

States generally submit their nominees to ED in February, with various winter deadlines for their state competitions to select up to five PK-12 schools and districts and a single postsecondary institution as nominees. ED announces national honorees in spring. The honorees are invited to attend a national ceremony in the fall where they receive a sustainable plaque.

If you have questions about the recognition award, or you would like to request that your state authority consider your institution for nomination, you can find contact information on the websites below.

- Contact your [participating state ED-GRS program implementer](#);
- contact your [state education agency, if not already listed above as participating](#);
- contact your [state postsecondary authorities](#); or
- or contact [U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools](#).

With the cohort announced in spring 2018, the award had honored some 386 schools, 62 districts, and 40 post-secondary institutions. Approximately 30 states<sup>7</sup> voluntarily nominate for this award and close to fifty percent of ED-GRS honorees have educated majority disadvantaged student populations<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Implementation varies from state to state, but in many cases, state education agencies spearhead committees that involve additional state agencies, regional federal personnel, and state-specific and national non-profits.

<sup>7</sup> All states, territories, the District of Columbia, Department of Defense Education Activity, and the Bureau of Indian Education are permitted to nominate.

<sup>8</sup> Disadvantaged is defined by each state authority, but most use schools with more than 40% free and reduced price lunch eligible. At the postsecondary level, schools above the median enrollment for Pell and related programs are considered disadvantaged.

